PRESS RELEASE

LOCAL CIVIL AIR PATROL SQUADRON PARTNERS WITH RIT RESEARCHERS

Civil Air Patrol Condor Composite Squadron Senior and cadet members recently partnered with a researchers from the Rochester Institute of Technology in a test flight of the NASA funded Wildfire Airborne Sensor Program (WASP) at the Perry-Warsaw Airport.

Squadron members placed test objects in specifically designated locations around the runway and in the wooded areas at Perry-Warsaw Airport. Teams placed the targets to test the reliability of the wildfire detection system aboard the twin engine Piper Aztec aircraft that made passes at different altitudes over the airport beginning at 10,000 feet.

At dusk, teams placed candles, flares, small table-top grills, a four wheeler and an airplane at specific coordinates on the airport property. Team members also acted as human targets to be detected from the air. Squadron members then took their positions to begin the test. Cadet members were able to participate in the test with the guidance of senior officers and oversight by the squadron's safety officer.

The test was a success according to RIT researcher and squadron First Lieutenant Don McKeown of Warsaw. "Thanks to the support we received from the Condor Squadron, we were able to demonstrate the ability of WASP to detect small charcoal fires under tree canopies as well as to detect aircraft and people on the ground at night," said McKeown of the test. McKeown is also the local squadron's aerospace education officer. He frequently conducts discussions and trains the cadet and senior members on relevant aerospace issues and principles of flight dynamics.

The WASP system combines three infrared heat sensing cameras, GPS equipment, and a high –resolution visible light digital camera which is equipped with spectral filters. The air craft then flies at 10,000 feet with the equipment mounted on a gimbal in the aircraft underside. The cameras sweep from side to side from horizon to horizon along the aircraft's flight path detecting new or existing wildfires. The cameras can detect fires as small as less than a foot across and can pick up fires below 600 degrees Fahrenheit. These fires are considered cool and would not be large enough to generate smoke, making them undetectable with current airborne fire detection equipment.

The WASP program is of vital interest particularly in the wildfire plagued western United States.
"It is critical to detect these small fires so they can be contained before they become out of control," says McKeown. The precision GPS equipment also pinpoints the exact latitude and longitude of each fire, allowing firefighters to quickly respond. The WASP system tested over the Perry Warsaw airport will soon be flying out west, conducting tests for the US Forest Service.

Civil Air Patrol, the official Air Force Auxiliary, is a nonprofit organization with more than 63,000 members nationwide. It performs 95% of continental U.S. search and rescue missions as tasked by the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center. Volunteers also perform homeland security, disaster relief and counterdrug missions at the request of federal, state and local agencies. The members take a leading role in aerospace education and serve as mentors to the almost 27,000 young people currently participating in CAP cadet programs. On the Web visit: www.capnhq.gov

-30-

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